NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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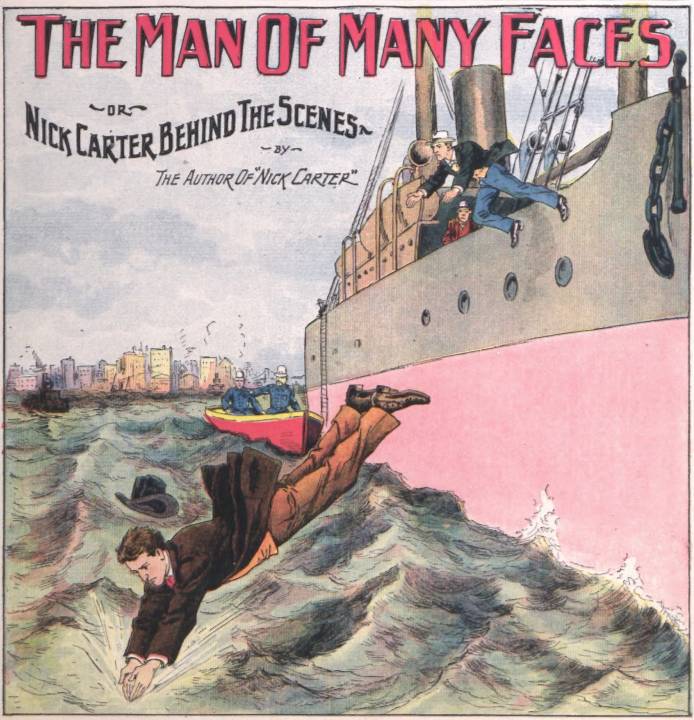
No. 505 NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 1, 1906. Price, Five Cents

THE MAN OF MANY FACES

—OR— NICK CARTER BEHIND THE SCENES

—BY— THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Lacey dived head downward as if he meant to reach the bottom and stay there. In another instant Nick was after him.

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The Man of Many Faces;

OR,

NICK CARTER BEHIND THE SCENES.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A BORN GAMBLER.

A succession of daring burglaries had occurred in and about an ultra-fashionable community near New York, and now they had culminated in a murder.

At least, that was what the family and the nearest friends of the dead man claimed; but there were others who insisted that Gordon Granville had killed himself.

That there was considerable reason for this view on the part of the general public cannot be denied, since it was discovered immediately after the death of the man that his financial affairs were terribly involved, and that he was really at a crisis in his life, where ruin—utter ruin and dishonor as well—stared him in the face.

The circumstances, in brief, were these:

Gordon Granville, a man of affairs, who had not yet reached middle age, had been shot dead in his own house, in the middle of the night, either by his own hand or the hand of an assassin who had visited the place with intent to commit a burglary.

Mrs. Granville's relation of the incident was to the effect that her husband had entered her sleeping-room in the night, and had taken from a bureau-drawer a revolver which he was in the habit of keeping there.

Aroused from sleep by his presence, she had inquired what was the matter, and he had replied to her that he had heard a noise down-stairs, and believed there were burglars in the house.

She at first begged him not to go down, but he insisted, and cautioned her to keep quiet.

A young bulldog, named Bob, which was in the habit of sleeping in the same room with his mistress, rose and followed his master down the stairs, while Mrs. Granville, in fear and trembling, covered her head with the bed-clothes, and waited.

There was an interval of silence, and then, somewhat indistinctly because of the fact that the bedclothing was drawn over her head, the woman heard a pistol-shot; and the shot was so closely followed by a second one that at first it did not occur to her that there had been two; she was really conscious of only one at the time.

She waited a moment more, and, hearing nothing,

sprang from the bed and ran into the hall, where she stopped at the top of the stairs.

From there she called to her husband, and although she received no reply, she thought she did hear a groan.

Frightened, but more convinced for his safety than for her own, she descended the stairs, only to find her husband near the foot of them—dead.

He had been shot through the heart and had breathed his last within a very few moments. He was dead before she reached his side.

It developed later that the silverware in the dining-room had been piled in a heap on the floor, and upon a table-cloth which had been spread out for the purpose; it was stated, also, that a door which opened from the dining-room upon a back stoop was found to be unlocked, although closed.

Two servants who were employed in the house had been awakened by something which they supposed—afterward—was a pistol-shot.

Nobody in the house remembered to have heard the dog, Bob, growl or bark, although he was known to be in the habit of doing both upon the slightest provocation.

Such was the relation of the matter as obtained by the police and the coroner from Mrs. Granville, and from the servants in the house, and such was the belief about it that was entertained by Gordon Granville's intimate friends, and the friends of the family generally.

The police held a different view from the start.

They insisted that there had been no burglar in the house at all; that if there had been he would have left some traces behind him other than the mere pile of silver on the floor in the dining-room; that the ground was soft in the back-yard, and that he would have left footprints there had he dashed away precipitately, immediately after the commission of the crime; and that he would most likely have been seen while making his escape, either by a milkman who at the moment happened to be in the neighborhood, and whose horse and wagon were standing where the driver—the milkman—could see both sides of the house—that is, the front and rear—at the same moment.

In support of the premises taken by the members of the police, it speedily developed after the death of Granville that ruin, dishonor, and the consequences of embezzlement, stared him in the face, and it was therefore insisted that, rather than face the consequences of his acts and the wrongful hypothecation of securities, he had killed himself.

An autopsy, at first prohibited by Mrs. Granville, but later insisted upon by the coroner, developed the fact that the bullet which had killed the man was of the same caliber as the cartridge used in his own weapon, from which only one shot had been discharged, *although another cartridge in the chamber of the weapon had at one time or another been struck by the hammer and had failed to explode.*

All of this—that is, these two views—had been thoroughly aired in the newspapers, and Nick Carter had read them with some care, the reason being that the dead man had not been a stranger to him.

The detective had met him on several occasions. He had admired and had liked him, and while Nick Carter was greatly shocked, and immeasurably astonished, by the news of Granville's wrong-doing, he did not—entirely, at least—accept the theory of suicide.

It was not until several days after the funeral that the detective referred to the subject at all in words; but it happened then that he had just been reading more about it in the papers when Chick entered the room.

"Chick," he said, "have you been following the developments of that Granville affair?"

"You mean the newspaper developments, don't you?" asked the assistant, in reply.

"Certainly."

"Yes. I have read about all that has been printed about it."

"What do you think of it?"

"I really don't think at all. It is altogether too involved to express an opinion without having taken a personal observation."

"And that," said the detective, "is precisely what I propose to do."

"Do you mean that you intend to go down there and investigate the case yourself?"

"Yes."

"I suppose the widow has sent for you; eh?"

"No. She has not; but, all the same, I am going to do something that I rarely do, Chick."

"Offer her your services?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well, I have several reasons, but I don't know as any one of them is sufficient unto itself. For one thing, I knew Granville in a casual way."

"Yes. I know that."

"He was a born gambler, Chick. I don't mean by that, that he was in the habit of playing faro, or rouge-et-noir, or poker, or roulette; I mean that he was fond of taking long chances wherever and whenever the possibilities were great."

"Well?"

"I have been watching the papers rather closely since the killing, and I see this morning, by the quotations, that if Granville had lived until to-day, he could have sold out and cleaned up without the loss of a dollar, and that nobody would ever have been the wiser concerning his wrongful hypothecation of the securities that were in his custody."

"All the same," said Chick, "a considerable amount of

those securities were due to be returned to Carpenter & Co. on the very day after the tragedy. Now, that would suggest——"

"Nothing," said the detective.

"Eh?"

"It would suggest nothing at all in connection with his death—to me."

"But I don't see why not."

"Simply for the reason that there are half a dozen men in New York from any of whom and from each of whom he could have borrowed a hundred thousand dollars in cash the day before his death. Something less than two hundred thousand dollars would have pulled him through."

"Then why did he not go to one or more of those men that day—the day before his death—and get the money?" asked Chick.

"I think I can answer that question. It was because he waited for the market to close, hoping until the last moment of the day for a rise; and determined to borrow the money he needed, the next morning, in case that rise did not materialize."

The assistant shook his head in doubt.

"It looks to me," he said, "very much as if he committed suicide."

"And to me," insisted the detective, "it does not look that way at all. Remember, I knew the man. Not intimately, of course; but I don't have to know a man intimately in order to understand him more or less well. Gordon Granville was a good fellow, if he did do wrong. He was a man with a whole lot of nerve, and courage and daring."

"With nerve, and courage, and daring enough to kill himself," suggested Chick.

"Wait. I am convinced that he was not of the kill-himself kind. Men who gamble sometimes kill themselves after making great losses, but it is because they are not born gamblers, and the nervous strain upon them has been so great as to unman them after losing. A born gambler never counts his losses; he counts only his winnings."

"Where is the argument, Nick?"

"The argument is that Granville, as I said a moment ago, was a born gambler. He took long chances because he liked to do it. He has been associated with affairs in the 'Street' for so long a time that in hypothecating those securities as he did, he was reasonably certain that within a short time he could clean up and get out of it all right; and the result of it, as it appears among the quotations to-day, proves that he was right. The mere fact that the rise in stocks came a few days later than he expected it would do, is merely an incident which proves that among his calculations he did not take into consideration the most likely thing that can happen to any man."

"What is that?"

"Sudden death."

"Oh!"

"It is the commonest thing that happens to mankind, and yet it is the one thing which men never include in their plans."

"I guess that's right, Nick."

"Granville was associated with the richest and the most influential men of the financial world of New York. He was in a position to obtain reliable information in advance of others. He knew, when he hypothecated those securities, exactly where the money was coming from to redeem them, the only trouble being that something which he had not foreseen delayed things for a few days; but it is my belief that if he had lived until the next morning, he would have borrowed the money he needed, before ten o'clock, and that, with the opening of the banks for the business of the day, he would have presented himself at the office of Carpenter & Co. with the cash or with checks to settle his account with them."

"It would be a great comfort to the widow, Nick, if you could establish the truth of that statement," said Chick.

"That is precisely what I intend to do," replied Nick Carter.

CHAPTER II.

THE NIGHT OF THE BURGLARY.

It was contrary to every precedent of Nick Carter's practise to offer, unsolicited, his services to anybody, but he felt that in this particular case the act would be excusable.

His sympathy went out to the poor woman who was suffering in silence the double bereavement of death and dishonor, and he believed that it was his duty to do all that he could do to alleviate that suffering.

It was quite true that he could not restore the integrity of the dead man, for there was no doubt whatever that he had done wrong, and that he had done it wilfully, and for that his family and friends would have to bear the consequences.

But he felt that he could prove that Granville had been no coward; that he had done no greater wrong than thousands of other men in the world of finance were doing every day of their lives; the only terrible thing in this particular case being that death had stepped in at an inopportune moment and revealed all.

Had Granville lived, he would have cleared himself; or, rather, he would have arranged matters so that there would have been nothing to clear.

He would still have held up his head among his fellow men; he would still have been honored and respected.

Nick Carter could not clear the dead man's skirts of the crime that had besmirched them, but he could at least prove that there had been no real wrong *intent.*

He could establish, at least, that the man was not a coward, who weakly ran away at the first sign of danger, and left his wife to bear the burden alone. He could offer her a moiety of balm with which to cover the bitterness that had fallen upon her.

And this he resolved that he would do.

But he felt that there was a certain delicacy about his undertaking which he must observe.

To go to the widow unsolicited and offer his services were little better than adding insult to injury; and so he took this method. He sent Patsy, as messenger, with a brief note to the woman, to which he requested only a verbal reply.

The note was this:

"DEAR MADAM: I had some acquaintance with your husband. I have no doubt that he has mentioned my name to you, for I recall the fact that he once told me of his intention to do so in connection with a case of mine which interested him, and which he thought would interest you also. I do not accept the theory of suicide, and I feel great sympathy with you in this whole matter. If you will accept my services gratuitously, I shall be glad to place them at your disposal. You have only to say 'yes' to the messenger who delivers this, and to mention a time when I can have an interview with you.

"Sincerely yours,

"NICHOLAS CARTER."

It followed, therefore, that at eight o'clock that evening the detective presented himself at the house, where Mrs. Granville received him.

"It was very kind of you to offer your services to me, Mr. Carter," she said to him, as soon as they were alone together.

"I am very glad that you accepted the offer in that spirit," he replied. "I will confess that for a time I was quite reluctant to address you at all, fearing that you would regard it as an impertinence; but the more I thought about it, the more determined I became in the matter."

"It was good of you," she said again.

"I have felt," he continued, "that there are many things in connection with the affair which do not appear on the surface, and I believe that it will do you a great deal of good, and also that it will do *him* some good, if they are uncovered."

"I am sure of it," she replied.

"And are you quite willing that I should question you, madam?"

"Quite."

"We will begin, then, at the morning of the day which preceded the death of Mr. Granville."

"Yes."

"Was he in his usual spirits when he left you that morning?"

"He was."

"Was there anything that he said or did at that time which attracted your attention as being unusual?"

"Nothing at all."

"You are quite positive about that, are you?"

"I am absolutely positive."

"Had he at any time prior to that said anything to you about being in financial straits? Or anything which might have led you to suppose that he was embarrassed?"

"Nothing."

"Did you know that he was rather plunging, in a speculative way?"

"I know that he always speculated—nothing more than that."

"Was he in the habit of telling you of his gains and losses?"

"He frequently told me of his gains; never of his losses."

"Was he in the habit of discussing his business affairs with you?"

"He never did that. I understand very little—in fact, nothing at all—about business. He was aware of that. In fact, he sometimes joked me about it. I never knew what he was doing or what he intended to do save that he sometimes informed me that he had to attend this or that directors' meeting during the day."

"The newspapers have stated that there are documents in existence which you have signed for him."

"As to that, I can only say that I trusted my husband implicitly. If he came to me for my signature, I gave it freely and without question. I regarded it as my duty, and I always understood that there is some legal formality which requires a wife's signature in some transactions of her husband's."

"That is quite true, although it generally refers to transactions in real estate rather than in other matters."

"They are all the same to me."

"When he left you that morning—the morning before his death—do you know where he went?"

"I supposed that he went at once to his office. As a matter of fact, I do not know."

"When he returned that same day, was he in his usual spirits?"

"Yes. Quite so."

"And from that time on until he retired for the night, was there anything connected with his actions or his words which impressed you as out of the ordinary?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"He was quite natural in everything that he said and did?"

"Perfectly so."

"Did he refer to the business of the past day at all?"

"Not at all."

"It has been your habit to occupy separate sleeping-rooms?"

"Yes; we both rested the better for it. His room was across the hall from mine."

"Did you rest usually well that night?"

"Yes."

"Are you a light sleeper, or is it difficult to rouse you, once you are asleep?"

"Neither the one nor the other. I think I sleep normally. However, if my husband moved around at all in the night it invariably roused me."

"Was he in the habit of doing that?"

"No; but sometimes he was restless. He was president of several companies; vice-president of others; director in others. He had a multitude of affairs on his mind, you know."

"Yes."

"I think he used to lie awake more than I imagined and think. I do not know that; I only conjecture it."

"I understand. The reports in the papers state that he came into your room in the night, in search of his revolver which was kept in your bureau—that his coming roused you, and that when you questioned him, he informed you that burglars were in the house. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"What time was that?"

"Very near morning."

"Daylight?"

"No; although I think it was very near dawn."

"Tell me when you were first aware that he had entered your room."

"I knew he was there the moment he entered it."

"Before he had crossed to the bureau?"

"Yes."

"Did you speak to him at once?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I knew it would annoy him to think that he had disturbed me; that is, under ordinary circumstances it would do so. He entered the room very quietly, and I supposed, if I conjectured about it at all, that he was after the camphor, or the quinin, or something he wanted that was kept in my room. He had had a slight cold lately."

"When did you speak to him?"

"When he opened one of the drawers of the bureau."

"What did you say to him?"

"I asked him what he wanted."

"And what was his reply?"

"He said, 'Hush!' I repeated the question, and he replied: 'Be quiet. I will tell you in a moment.'"

"Did you know that the revolver was in that particular drawer he had opened?"

"I did not know which drawer he had opened, but I knew that the revolver was in one of them."

"Did you think of the revolver at the time?"

"Yes."

"And did it at the time occur to you that he was seeking it?"

"Yes."

"Do you know why such a thought occurred to you?"

"I am always afraid of burglars. Our house has been entered before. I lived in constant dread lest it should happen again. I thought of burglars, thought of the revolver, and wondered if that was what he was after. That is the only explanation I can give."

"When was the last time that you actually saw that revolver before he took it from the bureau?"

"A few moments before I retired that night."

"You saw it then, did you?"

"Yes."

"So you are absolutely positive that it was there? That it had not been removed from the drawer before you retired?"

"I am entirely positive about that—yes."

"Now, when he took the revolver from the drawer, what did he do?"

"He turned and came swiftly across the room to my bedside. Then he bent over me and whispered:

"'There are burglars in the house, Mabel. I think they have been packing up the silver. I am going down to rout them out.'

"I begged him not to go, and he replied:

"'Don't be silly. Of course I shall go down.'

"Then he went out of the room, and Bob, the dog, followed him."

CHAPTER III.

WAS IT MURDER OR SUICIDE?

"When he had gone from the room in search of the burglars, what did you do?" asked the detective.

"I did what I suppose nine out of ten women would do. I at first sat straight up in bed, listening; and then, frightened, I dropped back again and covered my head with the bedclothing."

"How long a time did you remain in that position?"

"I don't know. Not long."

"Until you heard the sound of a shot?"

"Yes."

"There have been conflicting reports about that part of the incidents of the night. It has been stated that you at first said that you heard but one shot, and that later you altered the statement and asserted that you heard two shots. What is the correct version of that part of it?"

"I will tell you exactly what I think about that," replied Mrs. Granville.

"If you please."

"My head was covered by the bedclothes, and yet I know that I was listening, although I was, nevertheless, in terror lest I should hear something. I heard a shot, and instantly I cowered lower in the bed, pressing the blankets against my ears with my hands, in terror. Then suddenly I sat bolt upright and threw the clothing off me.

I am convinced now that I did so because I heard a second shot, although I did not realize it at the moment; but, Mr. Carter, I am quite sure that I would not have started up as I did if I had not heard a second shot."

"I think," said the detective, "that that is more than likely the case."

"Thank you."

"What did you do then?"

"I remained as I was for an instant; and then my concern for my husband overcame my terror regarding my own safety, and I sprang from the bed and ran to the door."

"And then——?"

"I stood there for a moment, listening. I heard nothing, and I called to him.

"'Gordon!' I said. 'Gordon! Where are you?'

"There was no reply, and I went to the head of the stairs, where I again stopped to listen.

"I thought then that I heard a groan; I am not sure about that, even now, for I had become greatly excited."

"Go on, please."

"I started down the stairs, but I had gone only a short distance when I discovered his body. He was stretched upon the floor near the door into the dining-room.

"From that moment on, I scarcely know what I did. I think I cried out. I know that I ran to him and threw myself upon him, or beside him. Regarding what followed, I am not at all clear, for I was only half-conscious, if not entirely unconscious. I do not know more about what happened after that until I became conscious that there were many people around me. The servants were there, and still others were coming into the house from among our neighbors."

"I can understand all that very well indeed. Now, tell me this."

"Yes."

"When did it first come to your knowledge that the silver in the dining-room had been piled together as if in preparation for removing it from the house?"

"I don't know. My recollection is that one of the servants told me about it. One of the servants, or one of the neighbors."

"Had you, yourself, heard the burglars in the house?"

"No."

"Your only knowledge concerning them was what your husband told you when he entered your room to secure the revolver?"

"Yes."

"And the information that you obtained later, that the silver had been piled together?"

"Yes."

"Did you at any time later discover that anything which a burglar might have taken was missing from the house?"

"No."

"It has been reported that the door leading to the back stoop was found unlocked. What do you know about that?"

"Nothing. I was told that it was so; that is all."

"Was the door fastened when you retired?"

"Yes."

"How are you assured that it was?"

"Because I attended to it myself."

"Now let us refer to the dog Bob."

"Yes."

"Where has the dog been in the habit of sleeping?"

"Always in my room."

"Did you request your husband to take the dog downstairs with him, or did he call the dog to follow him, or did the dog do so of his own volition?"

"I think that Bob followed him of his own accord."

"Did you hear the dog growl?"

"No."

"Or bark?"

"No."

"I have heard that he does both on very slight provocation."

"He does."

"How do you account for it that he did neither on that occasion?"

"I think very likely that he did both and that I did not hear him," she replied, with a wan smile. "And besides, Mr. Carter, Bob is like all bulldogs."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that he will bark furiously when he hears a noise outside the house, or is disturbed by another dog coming too near the house, but when he means business—as, for instance, when a person he does not like actually comes into the house—he only growls, and he does that in a very subdued manner."

"You are right," said Nick.

"I think you will find," she continued, "that it is a characteristic of all bulldogs not to bark much when they intend to bite, if they can. I know something about dogs, and that has been my experience."

"How do you account for the fact that he did not attack the burglar who shot your husband?"

"I have thought about that a great deal," she replied slowly.

"And the result?"

"There are two ways to account for it."

"Tell me what they are."

"The first is, that the burglar was out at the door and had closed it behind him before Bob had a chance to attack him, although I do not think that is the case."

"What is the second?"

"Bob was a puppy only a few months old when he experienced his first Fourth of July, and he nearly died of fright that day. He spent all of it under the bed in my room, terrorized by the noises in the street. Since

that time, Mr. Carter, he has been what is called by sportsmen, gun-shy. The report of a gun or a pistol frightens him so that he turns tail and runs. I have seen him do it on two occasions."

"So it is your opinion that all the fight was taken out of him when he heard the report of the first pistol-shot?" asked Nick.

"I haven't a doubt of it. I think that explains all the mystery about the dog."

"If he is gun-shy, it certainly does."

"He is gun-shy, as you will discover if you investigate."

"Where is the dog now?"

"He is with some friends. I will give you the address and a card to them when you leave if you care to test what I have told you."

"Thank you," returned Nick. "I think it will be a good idea for me to interview the dog."

"I would like you to do so," she said. "It will be proof to other people if you do."

"Mrs. Granville," said the detective, after a pause, "you are positive in your own mind, are you not, that your husband did not kill himself?"

"I am just as certain of it as that I did not shoot him myself."

"Pardon me for pursuing this line of questioning, but if we go into this matter at all, we must do it thoroughly and cover all the ground."

"Certainly."

"You do not think that he was the sort of a man who would have planned that thing deliberately?"

"I am sure that he was not."

"It has never occurred to you, has it, that he would go to the dining-room and himself arrange the silverware as if burglars had made arrangements to carry it away, and that having done all that to give the impression that he was murdered, would shoot himself?"

"Such a thing could not occur to me, sir. And besides——"

"Well?"

"If he contemplated such a thing, he would not have left the pistol in my room, and have taken the risk of rousing me when he came to procure it."

"Unless he thought that by that means he would convince you all the more that there were burglars in the house."

She shook her head emphatically.

"No," she said. "He would not do that. He would not deliberately have subjected me to such a shock. If you suppose for a moment that he did at any time contemplate suicide, he would never have pursued such a method as the police insist upon here. If he had decided to kill himself, he would have taken a different method."

"I quite agree with you about that, Mrs. Granville."

"Gordon was above everything considerate of the feelings of others. He was altogether too much so. He was always especially considerate of my feelings. If he had even considered the idea of taking his own life—which I am sure that he never did—his first thought would have been of the effect such a thing would have upon me—and he would have abandoned it on the spot, no matter what the consequences."

"Again I agree with you, judging from the little I have seen of him."

"Besides, or rather more than that, he always had an abiding contempt for suicides."

"You have heard him express such opinions?"

"Frequently."

"Was it his habit to class suicides as cowards, or as brave men—and women?"

"Neither. He classed them as fools."

"Yes?"

"His argument was that nothing lasts very long—either good fortune or misfortune. That all things turn and turn about over and over again. He used to say, 'We deplore a rainy day, and we forget that the harder the shower the sooner it is over.' He did not kill himself."

"I am sure you are correct about that, else I would not be here as I am," replied the detective quietly. "The question is, Who did kill him, and how was he killed?"

"Not how he was killed, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes. Precisely that."

"I do not understand you."

"Was the man who killed him a common burglar, or was it a man whom he knew and whom the dog also recognized? And was he shot with his own weapon by having it turned upon him, or was the deed accomplished with another and a different weapon of the same caliber?"

"You suggest new ideas to me, Mr. Carter."

"Yes. That is what I intended to do," was the quiet reply.

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER'S SHREWD DEDUCTIONS.

After that interview, Nick Carter at once visited the house where the shooting had occurred and examined it thoroughly.

He discovered there, however, nothing that would aid him at all in the work he had selected to do.

Too much time had elapsed since the occurrence for one thing, and, for another, the house had been thronged time and time again since then.

His only idea in visiting it at all was to discover if perchance there was anything about it which the police and the reporters of the papers had overlooked, to get a general plan of the interior in his head, and to stand himself where the milkman must have stood at the time he claimed that he could have seen anybody who had been escaping from the house by the back way.

But there was nothing—absolutely nothing that he could discover about the premises that could aid him in the least.

It had all been pictured quite graphically, and also quite correctly, in the daily papers, and Nick found nothing to add to the intelligence he had gleaned from them.

Next, he sought out the two servants and interviewed them.

They had been sleeping at the top of the house at the time of the shooting, and they told practically the same story about it.

"What I particularly wish to know," the detective said to them, "is if either of you heard the report of the pistol."

"We both heard it," replied the one who acted as spokesman for both.

"Was that what awakened you?"

"Yes."

"Did you know—did either of you know—when you were first awakened from sleep that it was a pistol-shot that you had heard, or did you only decide what it was after you had found out what had happened?"

"I didn't know," replied the other girl, "until afterward. I know that I was waked up by a sudden noise, but I hadn't the least idea what it was until I learned that Mr. Granville had been shot."

"And you?" asked Nick of the other girl.

"I guess I felt the same way about it as Nora," she replied. "I knew it was a noise, and I did think, when we were going down-stairs, that it might have been a pistol, but I didn't know that it was until I found that the master had been killed."

"Did you hear more than one shot?"

"No, sir, only one."

"But, according to your account, you didn't hear it very plainly?"

"No, sir."

"So you are willing to admit that there might have been two shots, and that it was the second one, and not the first, that awakened you?"

"Yes, sir, so far as I am concerned."

"When you got down-stairs, who was there?"

"The master was stretched along the floor near the dining-room door, and the missis was lying beside him, moaning. I ran out of the front door and yelled for help, and the milkman came. He rushed into the house and saw what was the matter, and then he rushed out again, firing a pistol into the air as he went. I think, sir, that he was that scared that he didn't know what he was about."

Nick smiled, for he thought so, too.

"You think he fired his pistol more to let the supposed burglar know that he had one than for any other reason, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I do."

"What did you do next?"

"I went back into the house and helped Nora with the missis."

"Who was it discovered the silver that was piled on the floor in the dining-room, as if it was ready to be carried away?"

"It was Nora, sir."

"Were you the first to discover it, Nora?"

"I was, sir."

"Did you see any other signs than that, that a burglar had been there?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"I think so, sir."

"Who has the care of the dining-room, Nora?"

"I do, sir. Bridget is the cook."

"Do you usually leave burnt matches lying around the floor?"

"That I do not, sir."

"Weren't there some on the floor when you——"

"There was, sir; true for you; though how you knew about it is more than I can say, for I gathered them up right away in the hope that nobody would see them."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I thought they would think that I had been careless."

"And so you told nobody about the burnt matches, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Were there many of them?"

"There were twelve, sir. I counted them."

"Didn't you know, Nora, that burglars use common sulfur matches when they enter a house, and that they light them merely to find their way around, and to prevent running into furniture, and so making a noise?"

"No, sir."

"They strike a match, and it is always a noiseless one, and let it burn only long enough to enable them to see their way before them. Then they extinguish it and throw it on the floor. That is how you happened to find the burnt matches there."

"Yes, sir; but how did you know that I did find them?"

"I only guessed it. Has nobody else asked you that question?"

"No, sir."

"Now, did either of you hear the dog bark?"

"I didn't," replied Bridget.

"Nor I," said Nora.

"Where was the dog when you got down-stairs, Nora?"

"By the master's side, sir, licking his hands."

"And whining?"

"Yes."

"How did he carry his tail?"

"He didn't carry it at all, sir. It has been cut off."

"I see. Did the dog act as if he had been frightened?"

"I can't say as to that, sir. He acted like a fool dog, I should say."

"Who discovered that the door which opens upon the back porch was unlocked?"

"I did."

"Was it closed?"

"It was closed and latched, but it wasn't fastened."

"How is it usually fastened? With a key or with a bolt?"

"With a key, sir."

"And is it the habit to leave the key in the lock after it is turned?"

"It is never taken out, sir."

"I suppose you have never heard that burglars sometimes carry a little instrument which is called key-forceps, with which they can turn a key as readily from the outside of a door as it could be done if they were on the inside?"

"I don't think I ever did, sir."

"It wasn't long after the milkman fired the pistol before others arrived at the house, was it?"

"No, sir. They came in no time."

"I suppose there were policemen there, too, after a while; eh?"

"Yes, sir. But it was a good while."

"Did they look for burglars when they did come?"

"Sure they did, sir."

"And the burglar might well have been a mile away by that time, eh?"

"He might, sir."

"Nora, is the dog Bob inclined to growl and bark?"

"Yes, sir, a good deal. He barks at people when they are passing along the street."

"At night?"

"No, sir. Only in the daytime."

"You don't often hear him barking in the night?"

"I don't think I ever did."

"Have you ever known him to bite anybody?"

"He tried to bite the garbage collector once, sir."

"Did he bark then?"

"I don't think he did."

"There is an old adage which says that barking dogs never bite, and that biting dogs rarely bark."

"I don't think I ever heard it, sir."

"Possibly not. Have you got a sweetheart, Nora?"

"No, sir; not anybody that I care about."

"And you, Bridget?"

"Nary a bit of it, sir."

"Then which one of you does that pleasant-faced, smooth-spoken, agreeable young fellow shine up to when he comes around? Eh?"

"Sure, he means that Mr. Smathers, Nora," said Bridget.

Nora tossed her head in fine scorn.

"He's no beau of mine, Bridget, and you know it," she said. "Sure I ain't seen him three times in my life, have I?"

"Maybe you haven't, but it's my opinion that you was willing to see more of him, all the same, Nora. Didn't you promise to go to the the-ay-ter with him? Tell me that?"

"I didn't go, did I?"

"And whose fault was that? He never showed up at all, at all."

"When was it that you were to go to the theater with Mr. Smathers, Nora?" asked Nick.

"It was that same night, sir," volunteered Bridget, before Nora could reply. "The night that the master was killed. Maybe it was because of that that he didn't show up, Nora," she added, "but, all the same, it would have been only decent of him to have come around since then and said something about it."

"Who is this Mr. Smathers, Nora?" asked Nick. "Where did you make his acquaintance?"

"Sure, she scraped it," intervened Bridget again.

"How was that?" asked the detective.

"Nora and me were a-sitting on the front steps one evening not long ago when the master and the missis were out, and he came along and said something about its being a pleasant evening. Nora, she answered him, and from that they got to talking, and the man was that fresh that it wasn't two minutes before he was sitting alongside of us. He was a pleasant-spoken man, too. He said his first name was Ike, and that he worked on the railroad as a conductor."

"I'd like to know how you knew about him!" Nora burst out, having maintained a silence as long as she could.

"I found it out," said Nick, "in the same way that I found out about the matches on the floor. I guessed it."

"And how did you guess it, sir?"

"Because I suspected that the burglar who killed Mr. Granville must have had an opportunity to study the premises before he tried to rob the house."

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WITH THE SMALL SCAR.

For a moment after that statement Nora stared at the detective, wide-eyed in her utter amazement.

"Do you mean," she asked, presently, "that you think it was Mr. Smathers who killed Mr. Granville?"

"I regard it as more than likely," replied Nick.

"Why, sir? Tell me that."

"Because one of the favorite methods employed by burglars when they are studying a house preparatory to robbing it is to make the acquaintance of one or more of the servants, and by that means secure an opportunity to get inside and discover how the land lies."

"But you can't think, sir, that I would have anything to do with such a man as that?"

"I am sure that you would not—if you knew it, or even suspected it, Nora."

Nora breathed a sigh of relief.

"I didn't know but you might think that, after what you said," she murmured.

"You didn't learn to care anything about him, did you, Nora, in the short time you knew him?" asked Nick.

"No, sir. Not exactly. I thought he was nice. He made love to me, though. He told me all about the money he had saved up, and about a little house, with a yard around it, that he had somewhere in New Jersey, and he said that all he needed now was a nice wife to take care of it for him. And he gave me a whole lot more of foolish talk, only I didn't pay much attention to him, for Bridget, when I told her about it, laughed at me and said that men who were so quick-spoken, and who warmed up so quick, generally cooled off jest as quick, and that I'd be better if I gave him the cold shoulder altogether."

"Bridget was quite right about that, Nora. Now, are you willing to tell me all you know about Mr. Smathers?"

"Sure I am, sir, and especially if you think it was he who killed the master."

"I don't say that I do think so—yet. But, all the same, I would like to know more about him."

"I'll tell you all I know, sir."

"You haven't seen him since Mr. Granville was shot, have you?"

"No, sir."

"Nor heard from him?"

"No, sir."

"And was it that same evening that he was to take you to the theater?"

"No, sir; the next one. The evening *after* the master was killed."

"Was he to go to the house after you?"

"No. I was to meet him at the ferry."

"Did you go there to meet him?"

"I am ashamed to confess that I did, sir."

"And he did not appear?"

"I didn't see a sign of him."

"How did you account for that?"

"I didn't try to. I washed my hands of him on the spot."

"How many times did he call at the house to see you?"

"Twice, sir; barrin' that first time when he got acquainted with me on the steps."

"And where did you receive him?"

"In the kitchen."

"Were your master and mistress home at the time?"

"I dare say, some and some they weren't."

"And that time when they were not, didn't he pretend that he was hungry, or something of the sort, so that he induced you to take him into the dining-room, or so that he followed you when you went into the dining-room?"

"One would suppose, sir, that you were the man himself, or that you were there and saw and heard everything that happened and was said."

"I am only guessing, Nora."

"Well, you can beat anybody I ever saw or heard of at guessing, for he did that very thing, as Bridget will tell you. But he wasn't there two minutes."

"Two minutes was quite sufficient, Nora."

"I suppose so."

"Where was the dog at the time?"

"Which time sir?"

"Both times, or either time. The point is, did he see the dog?"

"He did, both times. The second time he asked for him as soon as he came in."

"Asked for the dog?"

"Yes."

"How was that?"

"Well, the first time he was there Bob wouldn't make friends with him at all. He kept growling, although Mr. Smathers tried his best to coax him to him. But Bob wouldn't go near him. And then Mr. Smathers, he said, that he'd bet us both a pair of gloves that the next time he came Bob would lick his hands and sit on his lap."

"Did you make the bet?"

"Bridget did. I wouldn't."

"So I suppose that Bridget was careful to have the dog present the next time he came, eh? Wasn't she?"

"Yes, sir."

"What happened? How did the dog act?"

"At first he growled just as he did the other time, but Mr. Smathers he got up and went across the room to him and stuck his hand right into Bob's face. I thought the dog would bite him, but, instead of that, he began to wag his tail, and in a minute he was licking the man's hand."

"You thought that rather strange, didn't you?" smiled Nick.

"I never saw anything like it before, sir."

"What followed that exhibition?"

"Mr. Smathers went back and sat down again, and after a little he called the dog to him, and Bob went right over and licked his hand again, and then, sir, if you will believe me, he jumped up on his lap. Maybe you can explain that, too, sir."

"I can. Very easily," replied the detective.

"How, sir?"

"Thieves and burglars have an old trick for making friends with vicious dogs. There are cases where it does not work, but it will do the business nine times out of ten."

"I would like to know what it is, sir."

"A man has only to rub his hands thoroughly under

the fetlocks of a horse. There is something about the odor thus imparted to the hands which wins the good-will of a dog at once. It sounds foolish, but it is absolutely true."

"Well," said Bridget, "Smathers certainly smelled horse enough that night. So much so, that I told him that he must be a hostler or a coachman, instead of a car-conductor."

"Now," said Nick, "I want you both to give me as good a description of the man as you can possibly do it."

"He is tall," said Nora.

"And dark," added Bridget.

"And good-looking," continued Nora. "He has fine eyes, although they are rather wide apart."

"What color are they?" asked Nick.

"Brown; the same as his hair. Brown, with a reddish tinge in them; and his nose is what you'd call Roman, and very narrow at the nostrils, for its size."

"And there was a scar——" began Bridget.

"Just you wait," interrupted Nora. "When I'm through you can put in anything that I have forgotten."

"Go ahead," said the detective.

"That scar that Bridget talks about didn't amount to much. You could hardly see it. It is just over his right temple, where the hair almost covers it; and it is just a little white scar, not bigger than your thumb-nail, sir."

"Did he wear any beard?"

"No, sir. He was smooth-shaven always."

"Fine teeth?"

"Beautiful, sir. The whitest and evenest teeth I ever saw in a man's head."

"Any gold in them?"

"I didn't see any."

"How old a man is he?"

"I couldn't guess, sir. Sometimes, I thought he was only a boy, and then again I thought he was all of thirty."

"What kind of hands did he have?"

"That was what puzzled me, sir, always. His hands didn't look as if he used them in collecting fares. They were too white and soft. He had the hands of a gentleman."

"Was he taller than I am?"

"Oh, yes, sir, considerably."

"Nora, do you suppose, if you should see a picture of that man, you would recognize it?"

"To be sure I would, sir."

"And you, Bridget; what do you think about it?"

"I'd know his picture among a thousand, sir," replied Bridget.

"Do you think that you could pick it out among ten thousand?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir, or a million, for that matter, if I had the time."

"You shall have the time, both of you. If you will get your things on and go with me to New York right away, I will take you where you can look at some pictures, and I think it more than likely that you will find his photograph among them. While you are looking at the pictures, I will send for some theater-tickets for you, so that when you are through you can go to Keith's, or to Proctor's, if you care to. Will you go?"

"Is it the rogues' gallery where you would take us, sir?" asked Nora.

"Yes."

"I have heard of it. I would like to see it. I'll go if Bridget will."

"Sure," said Bridget. "How long will it take us to look at ten thousand pictures?"

"You may not have to look at ten," replied the detective. "You begin at the latest ones that have been added to the gallery, and you will work from there back. I think if it is there at all you will find it among the first hundred or so that you examine, so it ought not to take you very long."

"But you will go there with us, sir?"

"Yes. I want to stop for a moment on the way, and I will go ahead now and meet you at Dobb's Corner, if you promise to start from here within half an hour."

"We'll do that, sir."

"Very good."

When Nick went out he hastened at once to the place where the dog Bob was being cared for, and, upon presenting the credentials furnished him by Mrs. Granville, the bulldog was at once shown to him.

He growled rather surlily when he saw the detective, but Nick paid no attention to him.

Instead, he asked if the dog could be taken into the yard for a moment.

"I wish to try a little test on him," he explained.

Wonderingly, the request was granted; and then, as soon as they were in the yard of the premises, Nick drew a revolver from his pocket and fired into the air.

Instantly the dog howled and sought to escape from the leash which held him. He stuck his tail between his legs and in every way appeared to be terrorized; but when the first shot was followed by a second, he became frantic, and Nick returned the gun to his pocket.

"Thank you," he said. "That is all I cared to know."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN OF MANY FACES.

When the detective arrived at police headquarters with the two girls he placed them in charge of one of the detective-sergeants, after explaining to him exactly what he wanted.

"I wish you would assist them all you can," he added, giving the description of Smathers as it had been given to him. "You can save them the examination of hundreds of faces if you will take the trouble."

And so he left them, promising to return in an hour.

From there he went home, where he found Chick.

"Chick," he said, when they were seated together in the study, "I am positive now of what I only guessed at before."

"It was a murder, then, and not a suicide, eh?" asked Chick.

"Yes."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"I think that my original idea was entirely correct. I think Granville went home that night, determined to borrow the money he needed the following morning. It was because he had come to that determination, and was resolved not to bear the burden of wrong any more, that he was particularly light-hearted that night."

"Was he so?"

"That is the general report of him; that he seemed unusually gay and light-hearted that evening before he was killed."

"What you suggest might account for it."

"It *would* account for it. Don't doubt it. He had hypothecated securities, and he had carried the burden of the wrong as long as he cared to do so. He had made up his mind that if prices did not mend that afternoon, so as to pull him out, he would go to his friends the next day and borrow the money to square himself. The whole point is that he saw a clear sky ahead of him for the next day because he *knew where he could get the money.*"

"I understand."

"He had no thought of killing himself. I am more positive of that than ever."

"I am glad of that—for his wife's sake."

"I do think, however, that he was killed with his own pistol."

"Eh? How is that?"

"You remember reading in the paper, don't you, that only one cartridge in his revolver was exploded, but that there was another one that had been hit, and was indented by the hammer of the weapon which had not been exploded?"

"Yes."

"I am inclined to think that there was only one shot fired, after all."

"Aren't you rather paradoxical, Nick?"

"Not at all. My theory is this——"

"Well?"

"When he took his pistol and descended the stairs, he naturally went very quietly."

"Yes."

"The consequence was that he opened the door into the living room suddenly, and so, surprised the burglar who was at work there."

"Undoubtedly."

"Let us say that he raised his weapon to shoot the burglar; that the burglar saw the act and jumped for him; that, relying upon the pistol, Granville did not seek to avoid the attack; that he pulled the trigger, and the cartridge did not explode. Are you following me in this?"

"Perfectly."

"He was thus taken at a disadvantage; in other words, he had made no effort to defend himself other than with the pistol, and, therefore, the burglar, when he leaped upon him, probably bore him backward."

"I begin to understand what you are getting at."

"Of course, the burglar's first act in making the attack upon him, would be to seize the pistol, or the hand that held it."

"Naturally."

"It is not a difficult thing to do, to wrench a pistol from another man's grasp, when he is at a disadvantage such as that was."

"No."

"And in a struggle such as that was, or must have been, the hands of the opponents were naturally held rather high."

"Yes."

"Do you recall the description of the wound?"

"Not perfectly."

"The bullet went through the heart, but its direction was slantingly downward."

"I remember."

"The burglar, in trying to wrench the weapon away from him, managed to turn the muzzle toward Granville. Just here the hammer was somehow raised; the burglar saw his opportunity and his advantage. The trigger was pulled the second time——"

"Possibly, Nick, it is a double-action revolver. If it is, your theory would be all the stronger, for then the burglar would only have to pull the trigger steadily while he was turning Granville's wrist so that the pistol would point at him."

"I did not find out about that," said Nick. "But at all events, I am satisfied that he was killed in that manner."

"I begin to see it as you do."

"You see, Chick, that cartridge that failed to explode is very significant."

"Yes."

"If a man were attempting suicide, and had placed a pistol to his head or over his heart and pulled the trigger, if the cartridge failed to explode, ninety-nine out of a hundred would stop right there."

"Or the whole hundred."

"Yes. It would be a very determined suicide who would cock the pistol again and make another try at it."

"I agree with you."

"While, on the other hand, the very presence of that bruised cartridge is almost proof that he did attempt to shoot somebody else, who afterward succeeded in turning his own pistol upon him."

"Yes."

"Even if the burglar were armed—even if he had a pistol of his own, he would not have had an opportunity to make use of it. The intrusion was too sudden; the surprise was too great. When he found that he was discovered at his work, a revolver was already leveled at his head. What would nine out of ten men do in that case, when there is only a few feet of space between them and the pistol."

"Well?"

"They would jump for the pistol—just as that burglar did."

"But where was the dog all this time?"

"The dog knew the burglar. He had made friends with him already."

"But even so, if the man attacked his master, his having made friends wouldn't cut any ice with him."

"Probably not; but the dog is terribly gun-shy."

"Eh? How do you know that?"

"Mrs. Granville told me for one thing. I found the dog and tested it, for another."

"Still, he might have attacked and bitten the burglar before the pistol-shot was fired."

"We don't know that he did not do that very thing, Chick. That might be the reason he did not bark—because he was engaged in biting. That burglar may be carrying the marks of Bob's teeth at this moment."

"Bulldogs don't let go, once they have taken hold."

"Gun-shy dogs will let go of anything the instant they hear a gun."

"That is true of hunting-dogs; but is it true of all dogs?"

"Certainly it is."

"How do you get the idea that the dog and the burglar were already friends? Do you attribute the murder to one of the neighbors?"

"Hardly that. It was the old game of the burglar making love to the housemaid in order to study the lay of the land."

"Oho! So he had been there, had he?"

"Yes. He called himself Smathers, a car-conductor."

"Smathers? Ike Smathers?" asked Chick.

"That's the name all right, Chick, but if it is a familiar one to you, you are one ahead of your chief, for I never heard the name before in connection with a crime or with any criminal."

"Neither did I," replied Chick quietly; "but I know a man by that name—or, rather, I know of a man by that name."

"Why is he?"

"He is called the man of many faces, Nick. You have heard of him."

"The man of many faces? No; I cannot say that I have."

"Think a moment."

"What's the use when you have the information ready at hand? What do you know about such an individual? Tell me at once."

"He is a vaudeville artist."

"Eh? An actor?"

"I suppose he calls himself an actor. He is advertised as the man of many faces."

"Keep right on talking, Chick. I am listening."

"He is one of those chaps who come out on the stage and place a screen in the center of it. He steps behind the screen an instant, and then reappears in the character of—we will say—Emperor William."

"Well?"

"He dodges back again and reappears at the other end of the screen as Theodore Roosevelt. Next he shows up as Herr Most; next as Tom Lawson; next as somebody else, and so on until he has performed a dozen miracles before the faces and eyes of the audience. He is the man of many faces."

"And you know of a man by that name who does that thing, eh?"

"Yes. I have seen him. I saw him the last time I was in Boston. That is how I happened to remember the name when you mentioned it."

"Have you seen him *off* the stage as well as on it?"

"Yes."

"Describe him to me."

"He is tall, well-built, rather good-looking, with brown hair and eyes, an aquiline nose that is somewhat narrow at the nostrils, thin lips, good teeth, small, white hands, and he has a scar over his right temple about the size of a dime. He——"

"That's enough. That is the man. Tell me how you happened to take so much notice of him?"

"Because I helped to get him out of a hole on a Washington Street car in Boston."

"How was that?"

"A man in the car grabbed him, claiming that his pocket had been picked. He thought Smathers had done it. Smathers denied it, laughingly, instead of being indignant. I thought he took it splendidly. The man claimed to have lost his watch. Smathers offered to permit himself to be searched by any man in the car, and at the same time told who he was, and explained that he was playing an engagement at the Oberon Theater.

"I spoke up and said that I could vouch for the latter statement, for it wasn't an hour since I had seen him on the stage there."

"And he got out of the trouble, did he?"

"Yes; and gave me his card."

"Well, Chick, that is the man who killed Gordon Granville."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN BEHIND THE SCENES.

Chick was silent for a full minute after his chief made the statement that Ike Smathers, the vaudeville artist, was the man who killed Gordon Granville; and then, very quietly, he remarked:

"I don't believe it."

Nick did not at once reply, but presently he said:

"Chick, you are not in the habit of making a bald statement like that, in the face of an opinion of mine particularly, unless you have a mighty good reason for it. What is your reason in the present instance?"

"This," replied Chick. "I don't believe that the Ike Smathers I saw is either a pickpocket or a thief; and I *do* think that I am entitled to an opinion—in this matter, at least."

"Nobody thinks of denying you your title to an opinion, Chick; but you must have some good reason for expressing it so strongly."

"I have."

"What is it?"

"I base it upon my own judgment of human nature. I think I know a thief when I see one."

"Not always. There is no infallible rule."

"Ike Smathers is no thief. I'll bank my reputation on that."

"Listen a moment, Chick."

"Well?"

"Your description of the man is the same—in fact, it is almost word for word exactly what was given me by Nora."

"Well, what of that?"

"The name is the same."

"That is in his favor, I should say."

"Should you?"

"Yes. Smathers poses as the man of many faces, doesn't he? He acknowledges the name of Smathers, doesn't he? He bills himself at the theaters as such, doesn't he?"

"Yes, to all of those question."

"Well, Nick, if he is a man of many faces; if he is an expert burglar who will kill a man on provocation; if he is leading a double life, so to speak, do you regard it as logical to suppose that he would be ass enough to go to that house where Granville lived and to introduce himself to the servants under his own name? Don't you think that he would not only give an assumed name, but that in undertaking such a venture, he would adopt one of the many faces that he knows so well how to assume?"

"That sounds quite likely, Chick; but still, there is the description. When was it that you saw him in Boston?"

"The last time I was there."

"Have you any idea where he is now?"

"No; only that he plays the Crawford circuit. He is at one of their theaters; here, or in Boston, Providence, Pittsburg, or Philadelphia. I can easily find out by telephoning to Crawford's."

"Do so at once."

Chick wheeled in his chair and picked up the receiver; and after a moment of conversation over the wire he replaced it and said:

"He is here this week. He goes on for his turn about four."

"All right," replied the detective, "we will be there to see it; and we will be there at the stage door to interview him when he comes off; or we will go behind the scenes and talk with him in his dressing-room. Suppose you get your hat and come with me now to headquarters, Chick."

When the two detectives arrived there they found that Nora and Bridget had just finished their inspection of the rogues' gallery, and that their search had been entirely without result.

But on the way down, Nick had stopped at the theater for a moment, and he had managed to procure a picture of Ike Smathers, the "man of many faces."

"You could not find a picture of your mysterious acquaintance, eh, Nora?" he asked of her.

"No, sir. There wasn't even one there that looked like him; and we looked as far back as the sergeant thought worth while."

The detective took the photograph of Smathers from his pocket and handed it to Nora.

"See if that looks like him," he said.

She received the picture, and at the first glance she bestowed upon it she uttered a little cry of amazement.

"It's him!" she cried, with more emphasis than elegance.

"Are you quite sure, Nora?" asked Nick.

"Sure, sir, there can be no mistake."

"Show the picture to Bridget."

"It's him," said Bridget, with conviction. "I'd know him among a million."

"Thank you," said the detective, returning the photograph to his pocket. "By the way, I stopped long enough on the way down to get those tickets for the theater that I promised you. Here they are."

"It's Crawford's," said Nora. "Sure, sir, that's where I've been aching to go."

"Well, you have your opportunity. Those are box-seats, as you will observe."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Before the show is over I will come into the box and sit with you a moment—my friend here and myself."

"That'll be very kind of you, sir, to be seen with the likes of us."

"And now, if you wish to see all of the performance, you had better be getting along. You may expect to see me again before you leave the theater."

As soon as they had departed, the sergeant who had

supervised their inspection of the rogues' gallery asked if he could see the picture also.

"Certainly," replied the detective, handing it to him.

"Hello!" exclaimed the sergeant, an instant later.

"What is the matter?" asked Nick.

"Why, this is a picture of Ike Smathers!"

"It is," replied the detective.

"You aren't thinking, are you, Mr. Carter, that he's the man you are after?"

"That comes pretty near to being what I am thinking at the present moment!"

"Well, you're away off, sir."

"Why do you think that?"

"I know Ike Smathers."

"Do you? Everybody seems to know him but me."

"That is because you don't go to the vaudeville performances as often as you should."

"Very possibly. What do you know about Mr. Smathers, sergeant?"

"He is 'the man of many faces.'"

"Yes; I have been told that already. What else do you know about him?"

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I don't know very much more about him than that; only I've got a roll in my pocket—not a very big one, to be sure, but a roll—which says that Ike Smathers, 'the man of many faces,' now playing at Crawford's, is *not* your burglar and is *not* the man who killed Gordon Granville."

Nick turned to Chick and winked.

"Give me a reason for your emphatic belief in the man," he said to the sergeant.

"Well, if he'd been going out on any expedition of that kind, he wouldn't have given his own name; not likely. And, besides that, he'd have worn one of his 'many faces'; at least, he would have done so to *my* way of thinking."

"You and Chick seem to hold a belief in common regarding him," said Nick, smiling.

"I think you are beginning to take stock in it yourself, if anybody should ask you," said Chick, with a grin.

"You are right, Chick; I am. There is a mystery here somewhere."

"You mean, don't you, that somebody has been posing as Smathers, who is not Smathers?"

"That is the way it looks just at present; yes."

"What are you going to do, Nick?"

"I am going to the theater in a few moments and find out what the girls have to say when 'the man of many faces' comes on the stage. After that, no matter what they say, I am going behind the scenes to interview Smathers. I think that even if he is not the man we are after that, in all probability, he can put us onto the right track to find him."

"Another case of twin-brother?"

"Possibly."

At the theater, shortly before four o'clock, Nick Carter and his assistant quietly entered the box and seated themselves behind the two girls from Staten Island; and it was not more than fifteen minutes afterwards when the cards against the prosceniums announced that the next act would be by "The Man of Many Faces."

The screen behind which he made his changes was brought out and placed in the center of the stage; and a moment later Ike Smathers made his appearance amid a storm of applause.

But the detective was not watching the stage; his gaze was fixed alternately upon Nora and Bridget, but more particularly upon the former.

He saw that she gasped for breath the instant that Smathers appeared. He saw her clutch her companion by the arm; and then, with a visible effort at self-control, she turned to the detective and whispered:

"Mr. Carter, I think you knew that he was to be here, didn't you?"

"Perhaps," replied Nick. "Is that the man?"

"Yes, sir, that is the man."

"Are you very sure?"

"I am just as sure, sir, as that I am sitting here."

"What have you got to say about it, Bridget?"

"Just what Nora says; no more, no less."

"Are you willing to leave the theater as soon as this act is over?" he asked of them.

"Yes," they said in unison; and so, a few moments later, the four filed out and passed into the street.

The detective had already made arrangements to be admitted through the stage door whenever he should make application there, and so, followed by Chick and the girls, he was presently in what is known as the green-room of the theater.

"Wait here," he said to the others. "I will send for you when I want you."

The manager of the theater had met the detective when he went behind, and now he conducted the detective to Smathers' dressing-room.

"Will you want me inside, Mr. Carter?" he asked then.

"No; I wish to have a private interview with Mr. Smathers first. I would wish, however, that you will remain within calling distance. I may want you."

"All right. I'll be ready at hand. You have only to open the door and call."

He turned away and the detective rapped against the door.

"Come in," responded a cheery voice from the opposite side of it; but when Nick entered the room, in re-

sponse to the summons, Smathers stared. Then he smiled and held out his hand.

"I don't happen to know you," he said, "but you are welcome, just the same. Are you a newspaper man?"

"No," replied Nick. "I am an officer of the police—a detective."

Smathers' brow clouded for a moment, and then he laughed.

"Come to arrest me for impersonating the President of the United States?" he asked.

"No."

"What, then? To what or to whom am I indebted for the honor of this call?"

"You are indebted to a little circumstance which happened recently. Mr. Ike Smathers," said Nick, "there is a very grave charge against a man of your name, and one who answers to your description. It is murder, and I am here to ask you what you know about it—and if you cannot explain, to arrest you."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNASSAILABLE ALIBI.

When the detective made the quiet announcement he watched his companion narrowly, and, if the truth be known, he was not at all prepossessed by his appearance or his actions.

Smathers at first started—one might have said guiltily—and something suggestive of an involuntary oath escaped him. Then he frowned and bit his lip. Then he wet his lips with his tongue. Then he turned his back squarely upon the detective for a moment, but only to wheel and face him again and burst into a good imitation of a hearty laugh.

But it was an imitation; Nick Carter knew that positively. There was no mirth in it.

"Is this a joke?" he asked.

"I regret that there is no joke about it," said Nick quietly.

"It is serious, then?"

"Very serious, indeed."

"Would you mind telling me all about it, sir?"

"No. Rather more than a week ago a gentleman named Gordon Granville was murdered in his home by being shot through the heart by a burglar, who had entered the house and who had already packed, or partly packed, the silverware to take it away."

"Well?"

"That same burglar had, before that time, ingratiated himself with the two servant-girls who were employed there, and he had even promised to take one of them to a theater."

"Go on, please. I would like to hear it all before I say anything."

"The man to whom I refer went so far as to give his name as Ike Smathers. He also appeared in his own proper person, and he was so attentive to one of the servants that she, as well as the other one, was enabled to give me a very good description of the man."

"Yes?"

"That description described you in every particular; so perfectly, that my assistant, who once made your acquaintance in Boston, and who at that time saved you the indignity of arrest for pocket-picking, recognized you from the description alone."

"I remember that circumstance. Go on."

"I took those two girls to-day to the rogues' gallery, where they examined all the pictures on exhibition there; but they did not find one which even resembled you. However, I had, in the meantime, learned of your presence here, and I came to the theater and got one of your pictures from the manager. Both girls recognized it at once."

"It seems to be a case of dead-open-and-shut against me, doesn't it?"

"There wouldn't be much difficulty in convincing a jury, I think," replied Nick.

"Is there anything more?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me what it is?"

"I took the girls, or, rather, brought them to the theater. The moment you appeared on the stage to do your act they both exclaimed that you were the man who had called upon them."

"Is that all, sir?"

"I think that that about covers the ground so far as we need go into it at present," replied the detective.

"May I ask you a question before I attempt to reply to the things you have said?" asked the actor.

"Yes."

"If I were a burglar, don't you think that I'd be a monumental ass to go to such a place without a disguise, when I am an adept at disguising myself? And wouldn't I be a double-distilled one, with a bunch of green trading-stamps thrown in, to give my own name?"

"Yes; unless you figured on making this very argument if you should happen to be traced."

"I think that would be a foolhardy thing to attempt."

"Possibly. There was, however, one item in the description which I have forgotten to mention."

"What was that?"

"The scar which I observe is just over your right temple."

Smathers smiled and stepped closer to the detective.

"That is not a scar," he said. "It is a birthmark. Look for yourself, if you like."

"Well," said Nick, after he had done so; "we will say, then, that the birthmark was described perfectly to me; its position, color, size, and shape. Now, Smathers, what have you to say for yourself?"

"I want to ask one more question before I reply to that one, if I may."

"Ask it!"

"Do you, yourself, believe that I am guilty of this thing?"

"I must decline to answer that—for the present, Smathers."

The actor laughed aloud.

"My dear sir," he said, "I know that you do *not* believe me guilty, for I am sure that you would not have approached the subject in the manner you have if you did think so. You would have arrested me first and questioned me afterward."

"For whatever leniency I have shown you," said Nick, "you may thank my assistant—the one who stood your friend in Boston. He insists that he knows a thief when he sees one, and that you are not one. For the present moment, we will say, that I am deferring to him, Mr. Smathers."

"I am sure that I am under very great obligation to him."

"And, now, what have you to say about the matter?"

"I say—without intending to appear impertinent—that it is all absolute rot."

"Possibly; but go on."

"I was never in the town you refer to in my life."

"Well, what more?"

"When did this murder happen?"

Nick told him, and instantly Smathers' face broke into a smile.

"Before I make any further statements, would you mind if I should send for the manager?" he asked.

"I will call him," replied Nick; and he stepped to the door and did so.

"Mr. Pettis," said Smathers, as soon as the manager was inside the room with the door closed behind him, "what night was it that you, with several others, went home with me to my rooms after the performance and had a supper with me?"

The manager mentioned the very night on which the murder was committed.

"Thank you," said Smathers. "Now, will you tell us what time in the morning it was when you and the others parted with me at the door of my rooms?"

"It was half-past seven in the morning. We played a small game of poker, and did not stop until that hour. I remember the time perfectly."

"It was long after daylight, wasn't it, anyhow?"

"Certainly it was."

"Was I present with you all the time you were there?"

"You certainly were, Ike."

"And so, for how many hours during that particular night can you, Mr. Pettis, account for my time?"

"From half-past eight in the evening until half-past seven in the morning."

Smathers turned triumphantly to the detective.

"You see, sir," he said, "that I have replied to all your statements without the necessity of making one myself. May I ask if you are satisfied?"

"Perfectly," replied Nick, with a smile. "Perfectly—so far as the question concerns you, personally; *but not as it concerns your twin-brother, who distinctly resembles you and who bears the same birthmark above his right temple.*"

It was a guess, pure and simple—but it told.

Smathers bit his lip again. He frowned again. He turned away again, and then he addressed the detective.

"I have no brother," he said.

"Do you mean by that, that you have disowned him?" he asked.

"I have no brother. My name is not even Smathers. That is a stage name."

"What is all this about, anyhow?" asked the manager.

Nick told him in detail, leaving nothing unsaid, for he saw already that Smathers would never consent to betray his brother, now that there was absolutely no danger for himself. For his alibi was perfect and could not be disputed, no matter how many people might insist that they could identify him.

The manager listened closely to the end, and at the close of Nick Carter's statement his only observation was:

"It is mighty lucky, Ike, that we played cards that night, isn't it? Otherwise, you would be in a hard box. I suppose you are satisfied, aren't you, Mr. Carter?"

Smathers started again, and before Nick could reply he asked:

"Are you Nick Carter?"

"Yes," said Nick.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir, even in this manner. I have heard about you, and read about you, too. I would like to have you see my act."

"I have witnessed it," replied Nick dryly; to-day."

"I would like to call upon you some time, if you will let me. I think you could give me a lot of pointers about some new characters I wish to introduce. I know that you are a wonderful man at disguises——"

"If you will tell me how to find that brother of yours——"

"I have no brother, Mr. Carter."

"Let us say, then, the man who looks like you, who bears the same birthmark, and who does not hesitate to cast suspicion upon you for the crimes he commits."

"I must reply to you that I do not know of such a man, Mr. Carter."

The statement was made very quietly and very firmly, and Nick saw that it would be useless to pursue the subject further.

"All right, Mr. Smathers," he said, rising. "You stated a moment ago that you had heard of me, and read about me, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you know anything about me at all, you know that I never leave a trail until I have run my quarry to earth. I know that you know who the man is that I am seeking, and I know that, for reasons of your own, you will not aid me in the search. But I will find him, Mr. Smathers, just as surely as you stand there. Good afternoon, sir."

He passed out of the dressing-room into the green-room, and, having given each of the girls a five-dollar bill, he told them that they could return home as soon as they chose, but that under no circumstances were they to mention to a soul a thing about the occurrences of the day.

"This Mr. Smathers is not the same one whom you know," he told them. "Until I discover the right one and call upon you to identify him, you are to remain absolutely silent on the subject."

They promised him, and went away.

"Come, Chick," he said then. "You were right about Smathers, after all. He has an alibi which nothing could upset; but he also has a brother who is a dead ringer for him. Of that I am assured in my own mind, although he is too loyal to admit it."

They were leaving the theater by the stage entrance when the manager hastened after them, calling to Nick to wait a moment.

"Carter," he whispered, "I think it is my duty to tell you that Smathers *has* a brother—a twin-brother—who is a curse to him. That brother follows him everywhere; hounds him to death; bleeds him for money; makes his life miserable; passes under his stage name in places of ill repute, in gambling-houses, and all that. That man is somewhere in the city now. He was here at the theater only last night, to see Ike, but I would not let him in."

"If he should come again," said Nick grimly, "admit him—and keep him for me."

"I will," replied Pettis.

"What is his correct name?" asked the detective.

"Morgan Lacey."

CHAPTER IX.

LAYING A TRAP FOR THE MURDERER.

"I call that a fair day's work," remarked the detective, as he shoved his chair back from the table after dinner that evening. "Only, it isn't completed yet."

"I supposed not," replied Chick. "What is next?"

"Mr. Morgan Lacey is next."

"Where are you going to find him?" asked the assistant.

"I am going to put my finger on him about midnight to-night, just as surely and just as easily as I reach out and put it on you at the present moment."

"That *sounds* all right," smiled Chick.

"It is all right, too," insisted the detective.

"I don't suppose you have any objections to telling me how it is to be done, have you?"

"Not the slightest. I think I know exactly where he will be at midnight to-night."

"Where?"

"At his brother's rooms."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because Ike Smathers, 'the man of many faces,' will send for him."

"Oho! I see."

"Chick, here is a case of chivalry and loyalty on one side, and of utter degeneration and degradation on the other. It is pathetic."

"It certainly is."

"Two brothers, born of the same parents at the same time, as alike as two peas in their appearance, and as utterly unlike, as the poles are distant one from the other, in everything else."

"Yes."

"One is a thief, a burglar, a murderer, and everything that is bad, by choice; the other is, I verily believe, as honorable and as true a man as you will find anywhere in the world. One is a weakling, without conscience, without remorse, without gratitude, and without appreciation of what is done for him; the other is all that is good and upright and noble."

"It is too bad!"

"I honestly believe that Ike Smathers would have gone to prison to-day, rather than betray his wayward brother."

"It is difficult to account for such loyalty as that, isn't it?" asked Chick.

"Not at all. It is easily accounted for."

"In what way? How?"

"Imagine, for a moment, two brothers growing up side by side—one of them always bad, the other always truthful and good. Imagine the mother of those boys. Imagine to yourself how deeply she loves that wayward son. Think of her suffering, because of his waywardness."

"I can do that."

"Picture her again, worn out before her time, because of him. Think of her as being called away from all her troubles—dying—and that in the realization of all that her loss will mean to that wayward son."

"Yes."

"Can't you imagine how she calls the good son to her at the last moment, and places upon him the onus of caring for his brother? Of watching over and protecting him from himself?"

"Yes."

"Without knowing what has happened, I can guess that the situation is just as I have described it, and that Ike Smathers, as we know him, would lose his right arm, or his head, rather than betray his brother, even though that brother has committed a murder."

"But all that doesn't tell me——"

"It tells *me* that Ike Smathers will find some means of communicating with his brother between now and midnight. It isn't likely that he will go in search of him himself, for the reason that there is not the time. When he is through at the theater in the afternoon, there is barely more than sufficient time for him to go home, eat his dinner, and return to the theater; *and, therefore, he will send word to him to come to his rooms after the theater is out to-night.*"

"Which will be about midnight."

"That should be about the time that Smathers would expect to get to his rooms."

"Do you know where his rooms are located?"

"Yes; I asked Pettis. He told me."

"But why would Smathers send for his brother?"

"To warn him that I am on his track. To give him money with which to fly the country. To advise him to go to Argentina, or Uruguay, or Peru, or South Africa. Anywhere, to escape the consequences of his act."

"And, incidentally to get rid of him himself, eh?"

"One could hardly blame him for that. Now that murder has been committed, I will wager that, after the warning to-night, Ike Smathers will wash his hands of his brother after this."

"I should hope that he would. Do you intend to surprise them together at the rooms?"

"I intend to be present in the house when they arrive. You and I and the inspector."

"What is the place? A boarding-house?"

"Fortunately, no. It is a flat, where Smathers lives all alone. He is something of a student, and he keeps that place so that he can surround himself with the books he loves. He calls it home, and is never so happy as when his work brings him to New York, so that he can live there."

"I suppose Pettis told you all that, eh?"

"Yes."

"Does Pettis know what you are going to do?"

"Yes; nothing will suit him better than to see Smathers forever rid of his brother; only we are never to reveal the fact that he had anything to do with it."

"Have you communicated with the inspector?"

"Yes; he will be here at ten o'clock—or a little before that."

It was half-past nine when the inspector did arrive, and

immediately, from beginning to end, the detective related the whole story to him.

"Gee, Nick!" he commented, "you have accomplished more in one day on this case than all the others have been able to do in more than a week."

"That," said Nick, "is because the others, as you call them, took too much for granted. It is because the police down there are a little bit sore about so many burglaries being committed under their noses, and they were only too glad to have the murder look like suicide, in order that the burglar part of it might be eliminated. They jumped at conclusions, happy in the fact that they could do so. We like to believe the things that are agreeable to us, and to be placed in a position where we can refuse to believe the things that are not pleasant. That is a human weakness, inspector."

"I suppose it is."

"Are you all ready, inspector?"

"Yes. What is your plan?"

"I want to so arrange that we will hear a confession from Morgan Lacey."

"You mean one that he will make to his brother?"

"Yes. Smathers will charge him with the crime, and he will be defiant—at first. Smathers will explain how nearly he came to arrest because of it, and the brother will jeer at him, doubtless. At all events, I haven't a doubt that he will admit it all to his brother."

"Your plan is, then, for us to enter the house by stealth, before they get there, and to wait in concealment until they arrive, eh?"

"Precisely that."

"All right. I am ready. Come ahead."

And so the three went out together. They boarded a car and rode to the street they wanted, and presently were climbing the stairs toward the top floor, where Ike Smathers had his home.

It was a matter of only a moment for the detective to pick the lock and open the door, and they all passed inside; but not until Nick had gone in ahead of them and assured himself that the wayward brother was not already there, waiting.

But he was not.

There was no one at all in the flat.

It consisted of five rooms and a bath. That is, there was a parlor in the front, and a bedroom back of it, separated by folding-doors, which were open. Beyond that was the bath, and then the dining-room and kitchen. There was a fifth room—a hall-room—off the parlor, and this, the detective discovered, was used as a store-room. The door between it and the parlor was closed, and the small room gave evidence that it was rarely entered at all.

"This is just the place for us," said the detective, examining it. "We will leave the door ajar a little bit, so that we can step in there quickly when we hear them coming. From there we should be able to hear all that passes between the two men, for they will seat themselves in the parlor, without a doubt."

"I don't suppose we can expect them much before twelve?" said the inspector.

"No. At least, it isn't likely. Smathers' act is the next before the last at the theater, so he isn't through dressing until almost eleven. It would take him half an hour more to get home, and he would naturally figure on the possibility of a few moments' delay. I think he would fix the time for the meeting at midnight."

"Suppose he should have fixed it somewhere else?"

"I have thought of that, but I do not regard it as likely."

"Why not?"

"For one thing, he is not aware that I know where he lives. For another, he would not have his brother go to the theater, because Pettis, the manager, now knows that Lacey is charged with murder, and Smathers wouldn't trust him too far. For still another reason, Smathers has, doubtless, a wholesome regard for what I said to him this afternoon. He will know that I will be on the lookout for that brother of his, and he would not care to incur the risk of a meeting where his brother might be seen."

"But it might occur to him that you would follow him to his home."

"I think it will; and I think he will put himself to some trouble to find out if he is followed. I should not be surprised, even, if he should go to the extent of leaving the theater by the front entrance, disguised in one of the 'many faces' that he impersonates on the stage, and he may even make another change before he is half-way home."

"But where is the brother all this time?"

"The brother will be waiting in the hallway for him, or he will have a key that Smathers has sent to him for the purpose, and will arrive here first."

"Suppose he should take it into his head to snoop around the place when he gets here, and should find us here?" asked Chick.

"I have thought of that and prepared for it."

"How?"

"We will be inside that hall-room with the door locked and the key removed."

"What of that? He is a burglar. The lock won't bother him much if he wishes to get into the room."

"We will have to take our chances on that. If he does unlock the door and open it, I will nab him on the spot; that is all."

"And trust to luck to get a confession out of him later?"

"I have sufficient proof already without the need of a confession," said Nick.

"But——"

"Hark!" interrupted the detective.

They listened and plainly heard a step on the stairs, and at once all three stepped inside the small hall-room, closing and locking the door after them, and removing the key.

And then, a moment later, they heard the outer door open and close; they heard a light step along the hall, and they knew that a man had entered the parlor of the flat and had stopped still in the middle of the floor, to listen.

CHAPTER X.

A CONFESSION OF CRIME.

For some little time after that there was no sound whatever from the outer room; but at last they heard the stranger mutter half to himself—or wholly so:

"I don't suppose there is any law against my turning up that light so that I can see about me. I wonder if Ike has got anything to drink around the place."

Nick, whose eye was at the keyhole, saw that the gas, which had been turned low, was brightened, and then the man passed into the rear of the flat.

After a little he returned, and they could hear him throw himself into a chair.

"A fellow might know that there wouldn't be a drop around the place," they heard him mutter. "He took mighty good care not to leave anything valuable lying around, too. Mighty thoughtful of him, I call it. I wonder what the devil he means by that note he sent to me. He must have guessed that I was clean broke."

They heard a match scratch, and then smelled tobacco smoke; after which all was utter silence until Lacey started to his feet.

"I wonder what he's got in that room?" they heard him ask himself.

His tread approached the door behind which they were concealed, and he turned the knob and sought to open it, only to discover that it was locked.

They heard him laugh at that, and exclaim, louder than he had spoken before:

"He ought to know better than to suppose that a common lock like that could keep me out of a room. I'll just take a look inside while I am waiting."

They heard the jingling of a bunch of keys—probably skeleton keys—in his hands, and one of them actually grated in the lock, when, for some reason, he withdrew it hastily, and they heard him cross the room again and throw himself into the chair.

They understood in a moment why he had done that, for the outer door opened again, another step came along the hall, and the voice of Ike Smathers said:

"You have come, have you, Morgan?"

"It seems to look very much as if I had," was the surly reply. "What the devil——"

"Softly, Morgan. How long have you been waiting?"

"Oh, half an hour, maybe; maybe longer. What did you send for me for? You said the last time we met that you disowned me, and all that rot."

"I wanted to have a last talk with you, Morgan."

"A *last* talk with me! Ho, ho, ho! Much it will be a last talk. I guess you knew that I was broke, didn't you?"

"I supposed that you were. You always are."

"That's no dream, either. It's dead right, a good and plenty. You get a hundred a week and don't know what to do with your money; and I get——"

"What you can steal," interrupted the brother bitterly. "That, and what I give you; and you get the most of my salary, when all is said."

"Well, you can afford to give it to me. You don't need it, and I do."

Smathers paid no attention to the injustice of this remark, but continued:

"Morgan, I am going to give you more money to-night than I have ever given you at one time before."

"The devil you are! You must have broken a bank somewhere—or have broken into one," he added, as an afterthought, with a coarse laugh at his own joke.

"Moreover, it is going to be the very last that I will ever give to you," continued the actor.

"Oh, I guess not, Ikey. I think I know a way——"

"Stop! Stop right where you are and listen to what I have to say to you."

"Fire away, deacon."

"Do you happen to know what you are up against just now, Morgan?"

"Why, yes; I am up against my very respectable brother, who tells me that he is going to stake me a little better to-night than he has ever done it before, and who adds, by way of further information, that he is never going to do it again."

"Do you know that detectives are on your track—for *murder!*"

There was a dead silence after that question, which lasted some moments, and then Lacey's voice jeered:

"What's eating you, anyhow?"

"Don't you know that what I have just said is true?"

"No, I don't."

"Then I can assure you that it is true."

"Oh, rats! I haven't committed any murder, Ike."

"Yes, you have. You killed Gordon Granville."

"It's a lie, and you know it!"

"On the contrary, I know it to be the truth."

"I'd like to know how you know it, then!"

"I know it because you gave my name and represented yourself to be me when you went to that house before the commission of the crime to ingratiate yourself with the servants."

"You seem to know a whole lot, don't you?"

"I know what I am telling you."

"Well, what of it? Suppose I did do it—what then? It will be you who they'll be after; not me."

"There, Morgan, you are mistaken."

"Oh, I guess not."

"Yes, you are. You will not feel quite so much confidence in your position of security behind me when I tell you that a detective came to the theater this afternoon to arrest me for the murder."

"The devil you say!"

"And that he would have done it, too, if it had not been for the fact that I had a perfect alibi."

"Ha, ha! Maybe I've got one, too."

"Yours, whatever it is, will not suffice. Mine did. It happened that on that very night, I entertained a party of friends in this room, and that Mr. Pettis, the manager, was among them. He assured Nick Carter——"

"*Who?*"

"Nick Carter. Didn't you hear me?"

"Yes. I heard you all right."

"Mr. Pettis assured Nick Carter that I was here in these rooms from half-past eight that night until half-past seven the following morning."

"So that devil is on my track, is he?"

"He is; and he is very close on your track, too."

"How is that, Ike?"

"He knows that I have a twin-brother; that——"

"You infernal—— Curse you, you told him. You gave me away."

"I did not. On the contrary, I denied absolutely that I had a brother, and Mr. Pettis was silent on the subject, as if he knew nothing about it."

"I don't believe you."

"It is a matter of indifference to me whether you believe me or not. What I tell you is the truth."

"Then, how did he know that you had a brother, if you didn't tell him?"

"I don't know how he knew it, unless he guessed it, or has looked up our family history."

"What did he say about it?"

"He asked me about my twin-brother. He knows that we look exactly alike. He even spoke of the birthmark which we bear in common. More than that, he had the girl, Nora, there at the theater with him, ready to identify me—or you."

"Confound her. I suppose because I didn't show up when I said I would, to take her to the theater, she's sore."

"So; you do admit the facts, do you?"

"What's the use of denying them?"

"There seems to be no use whatever. I knew you were bad, Morgan, but I did not think that you would ever become a murderer."

"It wasn't a murder. It was done in self-defense. He tried to kill me, and——"

"Hush! Weren't you inside his house as a burglar, and did he not have a perfect right to kill you, if he could?"

"All the same, I never would have hurt him at all if he hadn't tried to do me. It was his own pistol, too, that shot him."

"Spare me the details. I do not care to hear them."

"All the same, I'm going to tell them to you. I was packing up the things—and it was going to be a mighty

good haul, too—when, pop! opens the door, and in he walks in his bathrobe, and with a pistol in his hand.

"I was on my knees on the floor, but I jumped up and made a leap for him.

"He wasn't more than a dozen feet from me, but, all the same, he pulled that trigger before I could reach him, and if it hadn't been that the pistol snapped—that the cartridge didn't explode—it would have been me instead of him that was killed. Do you understand that?"

Smathers did not reply, and his brother continued:

"I grappled with him then and tried to tear the pistol away from him. It was all over in about three seconds. You see, I succeeded in twisting the muzzle of the revolver around so that it pointed at him. In the struggle the thing was fired. He dropped like a partridge."

"With a bullet through his heart."

"I suppose so," was the indifferent reply. "It was his own fault—and his own bullet, if anybody should ask you. I didn't want it, if I did want his silver. And, besides, there was another thing."

"What was that?"

"He owned a no-account bullpup that came into the room with him. It wasn't three seconds after the man entered the room before he was a dead one, but all that time that infernal dog was chewing the calf of my leg; and he chewed some, too. But when that pistol went off, he skidlooed to beat the band—and I lit out."

"What did you do? How did you get away?"

"I was in my stocking-feet. I had left my shoes outside. I just shut the door after me, skipped across the small yard on the balls of my feet, and made myself scarce around there; and I was in New York an hour later."

"Morgan, will you tell me why you chose to pass yourself off as me in an affair such as that was?"

"I didn't know how it was going to turn out, did I? I couldn't foresee that there was going to be a dead one at the end of it, could I?"

"Oh, well: we won't discuss that part of it. It is done. The point is that you must leave the country at once. I have a friend who is connected with the maritime exchange, and I sent for him to come to the theater to-night. He has no idea why I wanted the information, but he told me of a tramp steamer which sails for Argentina at noon to-morrow. You must go by that steamer, and you must promise me that you will never return to this country again. Otherwise, I will not aid you."

"Maybe I'll promise, and maybe I won't."

"You will have to make the promise, or I will not assist you. I will leave you to your fate."

"And go back on your word to——"

"Hush! Not that, Morgan. Listen to me."

"Well?"

"I have with me five hundred dollars in cash, which I will give you. When you arrive at Buenos Ayres and write to me from there, I will send you five hundred more. After that you must shift for yourself, for it is the last penny I will ever give to you."

"And you've got the five hundred on you now, have you?"

"Yes."

"Then fork it over, Ikey, now, without conditions, or I'll serve you as I did the other one."

The listeners heard the click of a cocked revolver as he spoke.

CHAPTER XI.

A CRIMINAL'S DESPERATE CHANCE.

It was Nick Carter's impulse at that moment to open the door and dash into the other room, and later he regretted that he did not do so.

But the voice of Smathers, cool and calm, replied almost immediately to the threat.

"Put down your revolver, Morgan," he said. "I was expecting something of this sort from you. Look behind you."

It was evident that the man did look behind him, for instantly there was a commotion in the room. It was followed by the sound of a short but sharp struggle, a cry from the murderer, and the sound of a fall.

Again Nick was on the point of opening the door, but the cool voice of Smathers spoke again.

"You may get up now," he said. "I will keep this revolver as a reminder of the fact that my twin-brother attempted to kill me with it. Sit down there, now. Before we proceed further, I want to know if you accept the terms I have made."

"Of course, I accept them. There isn't anything else I can do, is there?"

"No."

"Then, what's the use of talking?"

"None."

"Where is that ship you have been talking about?"

"At anchor off Liberty Island at present."

"What's her name?"

"The *Irene*."

"What's her captain's name?"

"Fitzgibbon."

"Is he expecting me?"

"He will be expecting you by the time you get there."

"Give me the money, then, and I will go at once."

"Not so fast, Morgan. I cannot trust you, and you know it."

"Well, what do you propose to do, then?"

"I shall give you five dollars now, and with that you will go to the Battery, where you will hire a boatman to take you off to the ship. Here is a letter which you will take to the captain and deliver to him as soon as you arrive."

"He'll thank me for waking him up at this time of the night, won't he?"

"He will not object. You will take yourself there, and you will take this letter with you. In the morning, about ten o'clock, I will go aboard the ship myself, and I will take this money with me. Once on board, I will give it, wrapped in a package, to the captain with instructions that he deliver it to you when you cross the equator—*but not till then*."

"Go on! Oh, go on! Rub it in, Ike! You've got the upper hand now, and you can do as you please with me. I'm to be packed off like so much freight invoiced cash on delivery."

"Morgan, I wouldn't trust you as far as I could throw a bull by the tail, and you know it; you also know that I have good reason. I am going to feel assured that you are bound for South America, and that you cannot leave the ship to return, before I put this money into your hands. I should think that you would want to go."

"Well, I don't!"

"If you remain here, you will be arrested and convicted of that murder."

"Rot! I ain't caught yet. If you were going to give me five thousand, instead of five hundred, I wouldn't say a word."

"You need not say a word as it is. It is that or nothing; and, moreover, I will threaten you a little bit now, since you are so fond of threatening me."

"With what?"

"If you refuse to go—if you do not go—I will seek out Nick Carter and tell him all I know."

"You would do *that*?"

"Yes. I am tired of you; sick of you; through with you. I shall forget that I have a brother. If you remain here I shall forget, too, and tell all I know about you."

"How do I know that you will keep your word about bringing that money to the ship?"

"You have my word for it. I have never broken it with you yet."

"The ship may sail before you get there."

"I will be there at ten. The ship sails at noon."

"The captain may change his mind and sail earlier in the day."

"No; he won't do that. I made sure of the time of sailing."

"It would be a nice kettle of fish if the ship carried me away without a cent in my pockets, wouldn't it?"

"You will not be taken away without money. You need have no fear."

"Give me at least a hundred out of the wad now."

"I will give you five dollars; no more than that."

"What do you expect that I'm going to do with myself when I get to Argentina?"

"I hope that you will find employment of some kind, and earn your living like an honest man."

"I'd look fine working for a living, wouldn't I?"

"I work for mine. There is no reason why you should not do the same."

"Rot! You play for yours. Your work is nothing but play. I only wish that I had your talent for making myself up. I'd win the world in about a year. Still, there must be some good chances to pick up something down there. I say, Ike, let me stay here long enough to make a good stake, and I give you my word I'll go away without another objection; and I won't ask you for the five hundred, either."

"You will go at once, Morgan. You will do exactly as I say."

Nick Carter fancied then that he could hear Morgan Lacey grit his teeth in rage, and he believed that if it were not for the fact that Smathers had obtained possession of the pistol, his brother would have shot him then and there.

The detective could not see either of them through the keyhole of the door, but he could hear with distinctness every word that was said and every move that either of them made.

He felt that it was almost time to open the door and surprise them. In fact, he might have done so long ago, and only hesitated because he wished to hear as much as possible, and because he also hesitated to make it appear that Smathers had purposely concealed the detectives in his room in order to wring a confession from his brother in their presence.

Now, however, there could be nothing gained by waiting longer, and he raised the key preparatory to inserting it in the lock when the conversation was reopened again; and he waited.

"What's the matter with your going out to the ship with me now?" Lacey asked.

"I decline the honor," was the dry response.

"Why?"

"I wouldn't be seen on the street with you, Morgan, and I don't care for your company a moment longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Which means that you want me to go now, I suppose: eh?"

"Yes."

"Why can't I stay here till morning and go out to the ship with you?"

"Because I will not have it so."

"You could disguise me so that the devil himself wouldn't know me."

"That is true enough."

"Well, say, look here."

"Well?"

"You said that Nick Carter is already on a still hunt for me, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Suppose I should run into him, between here and the Battery?"

"You are not likely to do that."

"Why not? It's too far for me to walk. I'll have to take the subway, or a surface car. He is just as likely as not to be in the car I take; or that assistant of his—Chick, they call him. He's onto the game, too, I suppose."

"He was at the theater with Carter this afternoon."

"Well! Don't you see?"

"I do not see how you are to avoid taking the risk. You weren't caught coming here; you are not likely to be caught leaving here."

"I wasn't scared half to death, then. A fellow's nerve cuts a lot of ice in a matter of this kind, and you've taken it all out of me."

"All the same, Morgan, you will have to go. I will not permit you to remain here overnight. I won't have you in the house. You are a thief and a murderer."

"Rot! It won't do you any good to call me names. Look here, Ike, there is one thing that you might do for me."

"I will do absolutely nothing for you other than I have already said."

"Won't you even help me to disguise myself?"

"No. I will give you a tight-fitting wig, if you want it, and another hat and a different suit of clothes. You can paste a small false mustache on your lip, if you want to; but I won't touch you. I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole."

"All right. Give me the wig and the other things, then. You needn't touch me."

The detective heard a movement in the outer room. He thought that Lacey had risen to his feet, and that Smathers had turned away.

He inserted the key silently into the lock, but for some reason, which he never could explain, it stuck when halfway in and refused to go farther.

At that instant there was a wild, terrorized, agonized cry from the outer room.

This was instantly followed by the noise of a struggle; by curses in the voice of Lacey, and more cries from Smathers.

Nick struggled with the key unavailingly, and while he did so he could hear enough to know that a fierce fight was going on in that other room.

He understood now that Lacey's pretense in asking for things with which to disguise himself had been a mere subterfuge, by which he hoped to get his brother off his guard, so that he could attack him; and that the instant Smathers' back was turned, Lacey had leaped upon him.

Then, while the detective still struggled with the key, there came the sharp report of a pistol from the parlor.

It was followed by another cry, a heavy fall, and, finally, an oath in the voice of Lacey.

But now the key did its work at last.

It slipped into the lock as if there had never been an impediment to hold it, and in an instant the detective had thrown open the door.

Closely followed by Chick and the inspector, he sprang through the doorway into the parlor—but only to find that he was too late.

Ike Smathers was stretched upon the floor.

His hands were clutched frantically over his eyes.

Blood was trickling slowly from a wound over his right temple, exactly where he wore that strange birthmark, and he was silent and motionless, as if he were dead.

Lacey had disappeared.

It was evident that he had lost no time after the firing of the shot in making his escape, and it was also evident that, notwithstanding his haste, he had found time to thrust his hand into his brother's pocket and abstract the five hundred dollars, for Smathers' vest was open and the inside pocket was torn apart also.

The detective sprang over the body of Smathers and ran to the hallway. He descended the stairs in leaps and bounds to the street; but only to discover, when he arrived there, that the escaping murderer was not in sight.

He had disappeared as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

There was absolutely nobody in sight at all.

Morgan Lacey, for the moment at least, had made good his escape.

CHAPTER XII.

A VILLAIN'S GAME OF BLUFF.

The detective returned slowly to Smathers' flat, and there he found Chick and the inspector working over the unconscious form of the actor.

"Is he badly wounded?" he asked, the moment he entered the room.

"No; at least, not by the bullet. It was a narrow squeak, though. The bullet cleaned off a piece of skin over his right temple as smoothly as you could have pared it with a razor; but it only stunned him. He'll come around all right, presently. He won't think much about the bullet when he does, either."

"Why not?" asked Nick.

"He's got red pepper in his eyes. That was what made him yell so. I suppose Lacey got away, didn't he?"

"Yes," replied the detective; and then he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Look there!" he said. "He left the pistol behind him."

"Sure," replied the inspector.

"I understand," continued Nick. "We will have no trouble in finding him now, inspector."

"Think not?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Why?"

"Because he thinks he has killed his brother. He threw that pistol down there to give the impression of suicide, but he took the money and the letter his brother offered him, just the same. He will go from here straight to that vessel down the harbor."

"I guess you're right, Nick."

"I'm sure of it. Chick, you go out and ring for an ambulance, while I do a little surgery work with Smathers' head myself. We will send him to the New York Hospital, which is the nearest one to us, and as soon as we have done that, we'll follow Lacey. And I say, Chick!"

"Yes."

"While you are out see if you can discover a bottle of milk on anybody's door-step. It is almost time for them, and milk is about the best thing we can put on Smathers' eyes until he is directly under a doctor's care."

By the time that Chick returned, Smathers had recovered consciousness, although he moaned with the terrible pain in his eyes. But Chick had found some milk.

"Who are you?" he asked, for he could not open his eyes to see.

"Nick Carter, and Chick, and Inspector McLaughlin," replied the detective. "I have sent for an ambulance, Smathers, and I am going to send you to the hospital. Keep your eyes closed until a doctor has seen them."

"Thank you. I will."

"That bullet wound at the side of your head is nothing. It doesn't even look as if it were made by a bullet. You can say that it was an accident, if you like. We'll bear you out in that."

"Thank you again, Mr. Carter. Where is my—— where is the man who shot me?"

"He has escaped—for the present."

Smathers said no more. The ambulance arrived soon after that, and he was taken away to the hospital, and Nick Carter and his companions started for the subway.

On the way, the inspector stopped for a moment at an all-night drug-store and telephoned for a police-boat to meet them at the Barge Office, so there was no delay when they arrived there.

"I am almost afraid that we will get to the ship before Lacey does," said Chick, as they took their seats.

"Not at all," replied the detective. "He would not lose a moment. And he wouldn't wait to hire somebody to take him out, either."

"How would he get there, then? Walk?"

"Hardly; but he would steal a boat and row himself

out, so that there would be nobody who could say that he had been taken there. He'll offer the captain the whole five hundred to weigh anchor and sail with him at once, too, I'll wager."

"Yes," said the inspector. "And if the captain should agree to do it—if Lacey should happen to get away, he would murder the captain and get his five hundred back before he reached port. And after that he'd transform the crew into pirates, and go on a skull-and-crossbones cruise around the world. I have come in contact with a few scoundrels in my time, Nick, but that fellow takes the cruller."

"He had about an hour the start of us, didn't he?" asked Chick.

"Two," replied Nick.

There was silence after that while the boat, propelled by two sturdy oarsmen, pushed swiftly through the water, and after a time Liberty Island loomed ahead of them.

And three points off the easterly side of the island the hull of a big steamship could be seen.

They rowed around silently under the stern to make certain that it was the *Irene*, and, being assured of that fact, the boat was pulled quietly to the side, where a gangway-ladder had been shipped, and Nick, followed by Chick and the inspector, went aboard.

They had not been hailed from the deck. Nobody had seen them; and it was not until they were in the waist of the vessel, making their way toward the cabin, which was aft, that they were confronted by the night watchman.

"Where away, my hearties?" he demanded, and, although the tone was quiet, he held a pistol menacingly in either hand.

"We are officers," replied Nick instantly. "If you will look into the boat alongside, you will see two policemen in uniform there."

"That's all right. What do you want here?"

"We want the man who came aboard a short time ago."

"How do you know that a man has come aboard?"

The inspector stepped forward and interrupted.

"If you ask any more fool questions, my man," he said, "I'll take you ashore, and I'll promise you that you won't sail with this ship at noon to-day, either. Where is that man?"

"He's in the cabin with the captain."

But Nick Carter had already passed on along the deck toward the cabin, and now he slowly descended the companionway, for he could hear voices conversing together inside.

"I tell you, captain," he heard the voice of Lacey say, "that if you'll up anchor right now, without waiting even for daylight, I'll give you five hundred dollars on the spot, and I will give you five thousand in gold within twenty-four hours after you land me in Buenos Ayres."

"You seem to be mighty anxious to get away from here," replied the captain. "One might think——"

"I don't care a hang what you think. The facts are as I told you. I've got to get there and secure my property before those other fellows do. It's worth half a million to me to beat them there. They have taken the only passenger route from here; that is, they have gone by way of Liverpool. If you sail at once I can beat them by more than a week, and it's worth a fortune to me to do that. I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Well, what?"

"If you'll pipe up all hands, right now, and get under way without a moment's loss of time, I'll make it ten thousand when we get there—provided that you'll wait a few days for the money."

"Well, wouldn't that sound rude to you!" whispered the inspector in the detective's ear. "Did you ever hear of such bluff as that? He'll make the captain believe him, too."

"We won't give him a chance to do that," replied Nick; and he pushed open the door and entered the cabin.

As he did so, the inspector and Chick followed closely, and as Nick paused an instant and fixed his eyes upon Lacey, they arranged themselves by his side.

"It seems——" began the detective calmly; but he got no further in his remark.

Lacey perceived him the instant he entered, and he leaped to his feet; and with the same motion he raised something in his hand and hurled it at the detective's head.

Nick saw the motion and dodged, and the missile flew over his head and directly against a stanchion that was directly behind him.

It was a paper packet, and the moment it struck it burst; and, instantly, the cabin was filled with the dust of cayenne pepper.

It was so dry and the force of the impact had been so great that it flew all over the cabin in an instant, blinding the three detectives for a moment, and thus affording Lacey an opportunity to dash past them and gain the deck.

But Nick Carter had not received any of the pepper in his eyes, and on the instant he was after the escaping man.

Lacey ran like a deer, and Nick after him.

In a moment, almost before Nick could realize it, Lacey was over the side of the ship into the water, diving head downward, as if he meant to reach the bottom and stay there.

And that was, apparently, what he did do, for although the detective dived after him instantly, he found no trace of him.

Nick came to the surface presently and looked around him.

Chick and the inspector, now joined by the captain, were leaning over the rail, and they each said that Lacey had not come to the surface.

After that Nick dived again and again, but always with the same result.

He swam entirely around the ship then, but discovered no sign of Lacey, and at last he returned to the deck of the *Irene*.

"Lacey is drowned," he said. "There seems to be no doubt about that. He must have hit something and been stunned, when he went into the water; and the tide has carried him away. I am glad of it for Smathers' sake."

Nevertheless, they waited and watched until far into the forenoon before they entirely gave up; but then they bade the captain good-by and returned to the city.

At least, it was proved to the satisfaction of everybody that Gordon Granville did not kill himself. That much was accomplished.

Ike Smathers missed only two performances at the theater, for only a little of the pepper had really gotten into his eyes.

THE END.

The next number (506) will be "A Letter From the Dead; or, Nick Carter's Proudest Moment," to appear next week.

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